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ABSTRACT

In response to declining enrollment in teacher education programs and a mandate from the Regents of the Montana University System to accept special responsibility as a Rural Education Center for the State of Montana, the Education Division of Western Montana College (Dillon, Montana) in 1980 hired an applied anthropologist to evaluate the existing teacher education program, make and implement suggestions for change, and design specific courses to meet the needs of prospective rural teachers, with emphasis on understanding human behavior. The anthropologist identified rural problem/conceptual areas (recruitment, retention, isolation, multi-grade instruction) by consulting faculty members, and used these concepts to search the ERIC database for relevant material, which was then given to education faculty to read. A Rural Teacher Training System flow chart was created and a student questionnaire developed to gather baseline data on teacher education majors. An Introducton to Cultural Anthropology course was added to the required curriculum for education majors. The faculty decided to create a Rural Education Option, including two new courses, one addressing pedagogical aspects of rural teaching, and one, designed by the anthropologist, on problems of teacher adjustment in rural communities. The rural option was included in the 1983-85 college catalog. New courses, intended to expose sophomores to actual teaching situations and help students understand communities as social systems, were added to the general teacher education program. (MH)

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THE PROBLEM OF RECRUITING AND RETAINING TEACHERS FOR RURAL AREAS: AN APPLICATION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL CONCEPTS AND METHODS IN A DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Paper read at the 82nd Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, November 16-20, 1983, Chicago, Illinois.

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss both the role of an applied anthropologist in a Department of Education and the curriculum changes that have occurred as a result of his research. His activities have resulted in the creation of new teacher education preservice approach at Western Montana College. Initial research began in the fall of 1980 and by the fall of 1982 his findings were used to modify the education curriculum to include a Rural Education Option in the 1983-85 college catalog. The 1982-83 academic year was spent designing the courses for this option. The development of this option also had a significant impact on the general teacher education program and resulted in important improvements in that program.

WMC History

The first Montana Legislature established, in 1893, four institutions of higher learning for the foundling State. One of the four was designated as the State Normal School, which through a series of name changes is today Western Montana College. The sole mission of the Normal College was to prepare teachers for the public schools of the State and of the Northwest Territory. The College remained true to that mission for more than eight decades, even though its birthright as the only teacher training insitution was subsequently shared freely with other Montana Colleges, both public and independent.

The College grew steadily over the years and reached a peak enrollment of 1,072 students in 1969. During this period, the College did not deviate from its original function--that of preparing teachers. With the decline of opportunities for teaching positions in the early seventies, and the accompanying enrollment decline in teacher education programs, the student body of the College plummeted to less than 600 by 1976. At that time, the staff of a Blue Ribbon Commission for Higher Education appointed by the Governor of the State publicly questioned the viability and purpose of Western Montana College.

The Regents of the Montana University System, in the aftermath of the damning publicity, reviewed the situation and responded with an official and unequivocal statement that the campus should be maintained. Specifically, the Regents commissioned the College to continue its teacher training role, and accept a special responsiblity as a Rural Education Center for the State, and simultaneously to broaden its program offerings.

On June 25, 1979, the Regents adopted the following mission statement for Western Montana College:

> Throughout its history Western Montana College has been a teacher training institution and it will continue this emphasis ...

Western offers graduate work leading to the Master's Degree and Fifth Year Professional Certificate in Education (pages 19-20).

Following three years of interim presidents from 1976 to 1979, a new President assumed responsibility in September of 1979. Responding to the commission of the Board of Regents, he initiated unprecedented thrusts in student recruitment, academic reorganization, curriculum review, instructional evaluation, and program development.

The Problem

It was first recognized by Cubberly in 1922 and more recently by Muse in 1977, that the education of "rural" youth is a problem. The literature has adequately demonstrated that there are distinct differences between teaching in rural as opposed to urban schools. Prospective teachers are primarily trained for urban settings and are not prepared for the rural school scene. As a result of this type of training, teacher recruitment/retention in rural areas is a major problem that causes considerable negative impact on the teacher, student, school and community.

Characteristically, the new teacher is placed in a rural setting for which he is not prepared either pedagogically or socially. For the teacher the outcome generally takes one of two courses: (1) this negative teaching experience causes the teacher to leave the profession entirely, or (2) when the teacher leaves the rural area he will never consider a rural assignment again. The consequences for the student are (1) that he is taught by a teacher who never wanted to be there and who will be leaving at the end of the year, (2) and, as a result, the student is faced with a new, inexperienced teacher every year. The community also suffers from teacher turnover because it is continually

recruiting teachers who are not going to stay. This undermines the stability of one of their major institutions--the school.

In response, very few Departments of Education have attempted to modify their existing teacher education programs to address the problems endemic to rural schools. The staff at Western Montana College, sensitive to this problem, decided to evaluate their teacher education program to determine the extent to which their curriculum met the "needs" for rural preservice teacher preparation.

Why an Applied Anthropologist?

The Dean of Education at Western Montana College had been informally wrestling with the problem of rural education since 1975. Over the years it had become apparent to him that the psychological perspective alone was not sufficient to enable prospective teachers to understand the socio-cultural factors operating in isolated rural areas. The conclusions reached by the faculty, the dean, and the college president were that their teacher education program must include an awareness and understanding of (1) the concept of culture, (2) the anthropological perspective, and (3) rural field experiences.

In 1979 a decision was made to create a tenure track position for an applied anthropologist to become part of the education faculty. The ad in the American Anthropologist Newsletter was specific:

> 80-1055 WESTERN MONTANA COLLEGE seeks an applied anthropologist for tenure-track undergraduate teaching in two new college programs in rural teacher training and human resource management. Rural is defined as isolated ranch communities of five hundred or less common to the northern great plains and mountain regions. Candidates must have a doctorate and be willing to design courses and field experiences that will expose students to the socio-cultural explanation of human behavior. Teaching excellence takes precedence over research in this small college located in prime mountain recreation area. Apply by June 1, 1980, with letter of application,

vita and references to Alan Zetler, Division of Education, Western Montana College, Dillon, MT 59725 EOE/AAE

It is obvious from the ad that Western needed an applied anthropologist to do: (1) evaluation research on the existing teacher education program, (2) make programmatic suggestions for change, (3) implement these changes, and (4) design specific courses to meet the needs of prospective rural teachers.

An applied anthropologist was hired in the fall of 1980. The contract read Associate Professor of Applied Anthropology, Division of Education, Western Montana College. The "of Applied Anthropology" was requested by the applied anthropologist to preserve his identity as an anthropologist and give recognition to the discipline of anthropology.

The Conceptualization Process/1980-81

Essential to any research effort is the process of conceptualization. In the fall of 1980 the concept of a rural education program was only a vague idea at Western Montana College. In order to develop the conceptualization of such a program the applied anthropologist conducted a number of faculty meetings to begin collecting baseline data on the problems of rural education as perceived by the education faculty. On the basis of these discussions, certain problem/conceptual areas were defined (e.g. recruitment, retention, isolation, multi-grade instruction, etc.).

Using these key words or descriptors as a guide, the anthropologist reviewed all the descriptors in the ERIC thesaurus (1980) and produced a preliminary list of 147 descriptors. This list was submitted to the Montana State Library for an online search using rural as a control variable. Abstracts of all relevant articles were reviewed and when appropriate the entire article was requested. These articles were then organized into a packet of reading material for the education faculty.

On the basis of this first year's conceptualization and literature review, a "Preliminary Rural Teacher Training System" flow chart was constructed. This included: (1) a set of assumptions about the new teacher education student, (2) concepts and definitions, (3) a general schematic of the student program, (4) student-related research needs, (5) program-related research needs, and (6) a longitudinal research component.

A recurring question during the conceptualization process was: are there certain students who are predisposed toward teaching and if so is it possible to develop a profile of these characteristics? This question and the longitudinal research component required that a Student Questionnaire be developed for teacher education majors to gather baseline data on all new students. This baseline instrument was pretested in 1981 and 1982 and a revised version was administered to all education majors matriculating under the 1983-85 catalog (i.e., fall of 1983).

This baseline data will be updated at the end of each semester with academic information. In addition to this data base, a questionnaire will be administered to the WMC education graduates at the end of their first year and third year of teaching. This data will be used by the faculty as a longitudinal data base for evaluating the new curriculum.

The education faculty sought and received approval from the curriculum committee to include Introduction to Cultural Anthropology 101 as a requirement for all education majors.

Summary of the First Year 1980-1981

1. Recruitment of an Applied Anthropologist.
2. Baseline faculty conceptualization of the problems of rural education.
3. Review of the literature.
4. Creation of a preliminary "Rural Teacher Training System" flow chart.
5. Development of student questionnaire to gather baseline data.

6. The addition of Introduction to Cultural Anthropology 101 to the education curriculum.

The Conceptualization Process/1981-1983

During the fall semester of 1981 little progress was made on the conceptualization process due to the fact that the college changed from the quarter system to the semester system. All of the education faculty were busy reorganizing their courses and were unable to allocate the necessary time for a concentrated effort.

At the beginning of spring semester of 1982, the packet of articles on the problems of rural education was presented to the education faculty, and the conceptualization process began in earnest. From these articles (principally Muse 1977) thirty-one problem areas were delineated (see Appendix I). These were arranged under two headings: (1) problem areas over which we have some control at the institutional level (2) problem areas over which we have little or no control (i.e., institutional vs. non-institutional problems, see Appendix I). These thirty-one problem areas were then arranged under five major conceptual areas: (1) Program Orientation/Rural Education Advisor (2) Administration (3) Quality Instruction for Rural Teachers (4) Rural Teacher/Role Model and (5) New Courses (see Appendix II).

Each faculty member was then required to state these problem areas in terms of specific behavioral objectives for the student. This exercise resulted in the development of two major problem areas that could be addressed at the institutional level. From the point of view of the teacher, these differences or problem areas could be organized under two headings: (1) pedagogical problems (i.e., lack of formal teacher education courses to deal with the problems unique to rural schools) and (2) the problem of teacher adjustment to the rural community. The faculty then evaluated their current course offerings to see how many of these behavioral objectives were currently being met. After

many meetings, it was the consensus of the faculty that the best way to accomplish the behavioral objectives specifically associated with rural education was to broaden the curricular base to include a Rural Education Option.

Rural Education Option

It was decided that the Rural Education Option would require the addition of two courses to the general teacher education program. These were ED 450 Rural Education I and ED 451 Rural Education II for two credits each. Rural Education I was designed by the education faculty to specifically address the pedagogical aspects of rural teaching. The course description is:

> ED 450 RURAL EDUCATION I (2)
>
> Classroom and field exposures to the unique instructional methods applicable to small elementary and secondary schools including multigrade management, subject integration, local resources and supply/material limitations. Prereq: ED 101 and ED 388.

Rural Education II was designed by the applied anthropologist to address the problem of teacher adjustment to living in a rural community. The course description is:

> ED 451 RURAL EDUCATION II (2)
>
> Classroom and field exposures to the adaptations necessary to function in small communities and schools. Isolation factors that affect personal and professional living. Prereq: ED 101, A/SOC 101, and ED 288.
>
> Expanded Course Definition:
>
> The purpose of this course is to expand the student's ethnographic skills by doing a descriptive study of a rural community. The student will be required to spend time living in a community and recording the structure and function of that community. A typology of rural communities has been developed for Montana, and exemplary communities have been selected from the various regions. Profiles of these target communities are on file and community support for the student's visit has been arranged. The student

will select one of the target communities for his community field experience. This approach is used in order to control and monitor the experience for the student. This will allow the student to approach the community from a conceptual framework to make sure he becomes aware of the rural community scene to which he must adapt/adjust. This course will be taken concurrently with ED 482-4 Student Teaching.

The Rural Education Option was approved by the curriculum committee for inclusion in the 1983-85 college catalog.

Improvements to the General Teacher Education Program

As in any research and evaluation effort there were both anticipated and unanticipated results. One of the first problems that came to the foreground had important implications for both the general teacher education and the Rural Education Option. This was the lack of a controlled early exposure to an actual teaching situation. The literature documented that an early exploratory field experience, preferably at the sophomore level, greatly enhanced the students' awareness of teaching and their subsequent learning in specific education courses. In response to this problem the applied anthropologist developed a course called ED 288 Exploratory Field Experience for three credits to be required of all education majors during their sophomore year. The course description is:

ED 288 EXPLORATORY FIELD EXPERIENCE (3)

Structures field experience using ethnographic techniques focusing on the teacher as a member of the classroom, school and community. Formal entry procedures, evaluations and monitoring for the professional teacher education programs are initiated. Students are expected to make personal decisions affecting the last two years of teacher preparation. Prereq: ED 101, A/SOC 101 or CI.

Expanded Course Description:

> The purpose of this course is to employ the methods of cultural anthropology in an actual field work situation. Students will be required to do field work with teachers as their informants and write an ethnography (i.e., descriptive report) of teaching from the point of view of the teachers. The students will explore the various roles of the teacher as a member of the classroom, school, and community system. They will begin to understand the structure and function of the teacher, classroom, and school as part of the larger community system. This experience is controlled and designed as a weekly seminar with weekly field assignments. The students will develop an intensive awareness of the teacher as a concept through weekly discussions with other students and faculty.

The faculty spent the entire academic year of 1982-83 developing this course. Each faculty member was asked to conceptualize the structure of a classroom given their academic speciality (i.e., elementary, secondary methods, etc.). That is, what should a sophomore student see during his visits to a particular classroom? Six major conceptual areas emerged from these discussions:

I. Philosophy (teacher and school)

II. Biography (teacher and school)

III. The School as a Workplace

IV. Functioning as a Teacher

V. The Student as a Learner

VI. Community Context

Each of these six major areas consists of a series of sub-headings for which behavioral objectives were developed. Based on these objectives specific questions and/or observational categories were designed to gather data that would illuminate the behavioral objectives.

As each section of this initial instrument was completed it was field tested by the applied anthropologist and three graduate education students. This first field testing resulted in considerable reorganization by the

faculty. This revised instrument was also field tested by the anthropologist and resulted in additional refinement. During both field tests of the instrument the teachers being interviewed were asked to evaluate the nature of each question. In many cases their comments resulted in a strengthening of the instrument. At present it consists of 45 pages of questions and/or observational categories within the six major conceptual areas. The first field application of the instrument by sophomore students will be in the spring of 1984.

Another unanticipated benefit was an overall evaluation of the general teacher education program at Western Montana College. The process of conceptualizing the problems associated with rural education, the statement of specific rural behavioral objectives and the evaluation of current course offerings in terms of the "needs" for rural education, stimulated a complete re-evaluation of the general teacher education program. This resulted in the merging of some courses, and the development of new ones (e.g., ED 101 Introduction to Education). Even though this was not part of the original project it was well received by all education faculty members, and they felt that it resulted in substantive revision and improvement of the general teacher education program.

A final improvement to the education program that occurred as a result of the applied anthropologist's activities was a change in program requirements in order to strengthen the Guidance and Counseling Minor K-12. This now requires:

> ED 439 CULTURE AND BEHAVIOR (3)
>
> Methods and Problems in applying anthropological concepts to effect changes in culture. Applied anthropological projects are selected from various world regions. Prereq: A/SOC 101 or CI.

A/SOC 405 THE COMMUNITY AS A SOCIAL SYSTEM: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE (3)

An approach to understanding the community as a social system with references to the place of the individual in that system. Prereq: A/SOC 101 or CI.

Both courses are taught by the anthropologist.

Summary of the Second and Third Year 1981-1983

1. Administration of the Student Questionnaire, assessment of its problems and revisions.

2. Finalization of the rural education conceptualization process and statement of specific behavioral objectives for a new preservice Rural Education Option.

3. The development of a Rural Education Option with specific courses designed to meet the (a) pedagogical needs and (2) living adjustment needs of the rural teacher. (The latter is an anthropology course.)

4. Preliminary development of a typology of rural schools based on the number of teachers per school and State Economic Areas as defined by the U. S. Census.

5. A revision and reorganization of the general teacher education program stimulated by the rural education conceptualization process.

6. Development of ED 288 Exploratory Field Experience based on anthropological methods and perspective that will be of benefit to all education majors.

7. Approval by the curriculum committee to include the general education revisions and the Rural Education Option in the 1983-85 catalog.

Anthropological Accomplishments

1. The anthropologist was able to apply anthropological concepts, methods and the anthropological perspective toward solving the problems of rural education at the preservice or institutional level.

2. The anthropologist was able to design and offer several anthropology courses that form a core within the Education Department.

3. The applied anthropologist has demonstrated that anthropology and an anthropologist can become an integral part of an Education Department.

This concludes the summary of accomplishments over a three-year period from the fall of 1980 through the spring of 1983.

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1977 "Preservice Programs for Educational Personnel Going into Rural Schools". National Educational Laboratory Publishers, Inc. Austin, Texas.

APPENDIX I

Problem Areas Relating to Rural Education Outlined by Ivan Muse

Institutional Problems:

1. Hiring
2. Retention
3. Quality Instruction
4. Adjustment to small community & family life, etc.
5. Instruction tailored for rural students
6. Limited course offerings?
7. Limited vocational ed programs?
8. Personalized instruction
9. Special diagnosis - prescriptive teaching for children with learning & behavioral problems
10. Multicultural education
11. School dropout
12. Awareness of infrastructure problems in rural communities #3, 4, 5, 6, etc.
13. Academic motivation of students
14. "Reality shock"
15. Inservice/professional isolation
16. Training for more than 4 preparations
17. Teaching outside major area
18. Lower salaries (retention & quality instruction).
19. Recruit people attracted to rural areas

Needs Based on Survey

20. Practical methods courses
21. Deal with minimum facilities
22. Preparation in guidance & counseling
23. Preparation in a number of subjects
24. Courses in rural culture & sociology
25. Ability to teach several grades
26. Diagnosis & treatment of exceptional children
27. Preparation in practical rural living
28. Instruction in rural economic systems
29. Problem of spring boarding
30. Relationship between college & public schools/community
31. Specialists in Rural Education

Non-Institutional Problems

1. Hiring
2. Retention
3. Geographic isolation
4. Poverty
5. Housing
6. Medical services
7. Limited financial resources
8. Limited faculty & administration
9. Fewer specialists
10. School dropout
11. Unemployment
12. Academic motivation
13. Heavy work load
14. Lower salaries

APPENDIX II

I. Program Orientation/Rural Ed Advisor

1. Hiring/Employability
2. Retention
18. Lower Salaries (can we change this?)
29. Problem of Spring Board
Awareness of the 14 Non-Institutional Problems

II. Administration

19. Recruit people attracted to rural areas
30. Relationship between college and public schools/community
31. Hiring specialists in Rural Education
15. Inservice/professional isolation

III. Quality Instruction for Rural Teachers requires:

5. Instruction tailored for rural students
8. Personalized instruction
9-26. Diagnosis and treatment of exceptional children
20. Practical methods courses
21. Ability to deal with minimum facilities
17-23. Preparation in a number of subjects
16. Training for more than 4 preparations
6-7-25. Ability to teach several grades
22. Preparation in guidance and counseling
10. Multicultural education

IV. Rural Teacher/Role Model

11. School Dropout
13. Academic motivation of students

V. New Courses

4. Adjustment to small community and family life
12. Awareness of infrastructure problems in rural communities
14. "Reality Shock"
27. Preparation in practical rural living
28. Instruction in rural economic systems awareness of the 14 Non-institutional problems
24. Courses in rural culture and sociology